**Title of the Story:** Valdés Peninsula, an attitude change

**Destination Name:** “VALDÉS PENINSULA” NATURAL PROTECTED AREA, Chubut Province

**Country:** Argentina

**Submitter name:** Néstor R. García

**Email address:** nestorquiquegarcia@gmail.com

**Position:** Minister of Tourism and Protected Areas of Chubut Province

**Nomination Category:**

- [ ] Localizing the destination supply chain
- [ ] Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
- [ ] Culture & Communities
- [ ] Environment & Climate
- [x] Nature & Ecotourism
- [ ] Tourism Reset & Recovery
- [ ] Other
Along the shores of Atlantic Patagonia, northeast of Chubut province, the Valdés Peninsula appears, characterized as Argentina’s coastline most unique geographical feature. This "almost" island protrudes some 80km out to sea from the Patagonic coastal axis, linked to the mainland by Carlos Ameghino narrow isthmus.

A land where unique species in the world coexist in fullness and in perfect harmony, in serene and natural coexistence, making it a wonderful sanctuary for wildlife. Its fancy coastline creates optimal conditions for various species, such as southern sea lions, the only continental breeding colony of southern elephant seals, dusky dolphins, resident orcas (who have developed a unique hunting strategy in the world called “intentional stranding”), and the spectacular southern right whales that every year visit these coasts to give birth, reproduce, and nurse their young, providing visitors with one of the most stunning display of human interaction with a wild animal in its natural habitat.

UNEP-WCMC (2011) identifies 181 bird species, including 66 migratory species, and important nesting colonies of marine and coastal birds such as the magellanic penguin. Among the most notorious mammals of the steppe, we find the easily noticeable guanacos, along with maras and gray foxes, among others.

Valdés Peninsula is a paradise for native flora and fauna. This Protected Natural Area is diversely affected by coexisting economic activities, which arduously walk a learning route for the sustainable use of resources and the conservation of biodiversity. More than a century of private ovine livestock exploitation has modified and impacted on the Patagonian steppe, as did the development of artisanal fishing activities with quotas and specific gear stipulated for the fragility of this maritime space. Tourism and urban development also impact on coastal and marine areas, where precisely the main attributes of the area’s biodiversity are crystallized.
Chubut is a pioneer in the creation of protected natural areas within the province, and also a national leader in implementing policies for the conservation of natural resources. In 1964, the Provincial Board of Tourism was created, committed to survey the resources of well-chosen places for the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and its associated cultural values. In 1967, the first three fauna reserves of the peninsula were created: Punta Loma, Isla de los Pájaros and Punta Norte, giving unified origin, in 1983, to the greater natural area of Peninsula Valdés.

Since 1999, this Area has IUCN Category VI, with a total area of 887,775 hectares.

In the year 2000, Chubut Province passed the “Protected Areas” Provincial Law, giving origin to “Valdés Peninsula Administration”, a public-private organization that handles the economic resources and implements the area's management plan. Since then, all the activities in the Area have been regulated. Among them, the world-renowned on-board whale watching, creating the "Patagonic whale watching technique", which was replicated in the world for other whales species.

A Provincial Strategic Plan for Sustainable Tourism 2012-2022 was implemented under a collaborative way between public and private sectors, laying the foundation for objectives, strategies, and actions during these years.

Valdés Peninsula Protected Natural Area is mostly rural, with very few inhabitants. The only small village, Puerto Pirámides, clusters all services for residents and visitors.

Environmental education begins when entering the area, at the Carlos Ameghino Interpretation Center, where the visitor starts a unique experience of human interaction with a wild environment.

Five sites of interest: Isla de Los Pájaros (Bird’s Island), Punta Pirámides, Punta Norte, Caleta Valdés and Punta Delgada have the necessary infrastructure: trails, viewpoints, information posters, etc. which contribute both to the enjoyment of the visitor and to minimize the impact on the area.

All sites have a staff of expert and trained Wildlife Rangers who permanently work in the Area. Since the creation of the Area, the Ministry of Tourism and Protected Areas has worked with different entities in the implementation of several programs focused in its conservation and management.
Key success factors // Factores claves del éxito

Valdés Peninsula Protected Natural Area is a majestic setting, where amazement and fascination defy the perception of the senses. Geographical attributes of exceptional beauty, surprising archaeological wealth, and the magic of its ecosystems made it a global destination of excellence. This area is managed in a collaborative way with the actors and users of the resources, through a Management Plan and the Valdés Peninsula Administration. The enforcement authority, through the Ministry of Tourism and Protected Areas, along with other government offices, has regulated activities such as tourism, artisanal fishing, and sheep farming. Financial development of the area is promoted, allowing the sustainability of conservation policies through an entrance fee, tourist agents activities fee, and also external, national and provincial financing. The always present body of Wildlife Rangers, as well as having permanent support staff (i.e. maintenance, tourist information, collection of fees, etc.) has resulted in specialized management, overseeing of the area, and visitor services. Face value awareness was achieved by enhancing the recognition of its resources through international nominations from UNESCO and other conservation entities. Direct action from an engaged government, and the presence of true pioneer people in ecosystem conservation, allowed to successfully face the challenge of safeguarding this true treasure for future generations.

Lessons learned // Lecciones aprendidas

Valdés Peninsula endows us its heritage and brings us a message from the past. Respecting it not only means preserving its beautiful landscape, or saving from extinction the species that inhabit it. It also means to achieve, through responsible tourism, a change in our way of life and our attitude towards the world and ourselves. The main challenge at all times, in such a large area, is to balance the usage and sustainability of its natural values. A “Good Practices” Program for Tourist Destinations was put into effect by lodging and tourist service companies, and by visitor facilities such as the Carlos Ameghino Interpretation Center.
Responsible waste management and the use of renewable energies in operating units reduce the impact of visitors and staff.

Scientific research in the Area by renowned universities and national/international research centers was promoted, allowing us to have permanent information on the status of wildlife populations and environment.

Monitoring of production practices by different provincial authorities, allows for a balance between production and conservation.

Developing responsible tourism practices in the current complex pandemic situation has allowed adequate protocols for all activities in the area.

**Results, achievements and recognitions // Resultados, logros y reconocimientos**

Human population of Valdés Peninsula Natural Protected Area has increased, and the vision of the possible uses of nature has greatly changed in the last fifty-four years since it was created.

An area where its dwellers went from slaughtering sea lions and elephant seals in the first decades of the last century, to the current development of tourism, with strict guidelines for the caring of resources. Here, the Southern Right Whale is no longer in danger of extinction, due to the valuable contribution to its lifecycle by the Valdés Peninsula Protected Natural Area.

Designated as:
1999 - UNESCO Natural Heritage Site, considering it a site of exceptional importance for mankind.
2012 - Wetland of International Importance, through the agreement by Ramsar.
2012 - Wetland of Regional Importance, by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN).

Chubut Province’s Ministry of Tourism and Protected Areas has obtained the world-renowned “Safe Travels Seal”, because of the Covid-19 pandemic protocols devised to be complied by all tourist services within the provincial territory.

**Additional references**

We invite you to watch the video attached.